

MG and Pox Infections in a Wild Finch

A house finch (Figure 1, male house finch) was submitted by a veterinary clinic in northern Arkansas due to swollen eyes being noticed in some of the birds at a backyard feeding station. The necropsy examination was negative for any lesions, other than swelling around the eyes. Histopathologic examination revealed chronic active inflammation of the conjunctiva and lacrimal glands (conjunctival sac, Figure 2). Additionally, portions of the conjunctiva had locally diffuse proliferation of the squamous epithelium and these cells were greatly expanded by clear and eosinophilic pox inclusions (Figure 3). PCR testing of the trachea yielded a positive result from *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* (MG) infection (Figure 4, positive test trachea in lane 3 and positive controls in lanes 4 and 5).

House finches are native to central Texas to the west coast but not the eastern U.S. They were released from pet stores in the New York City area in 1940 and have been expanding their range western since then, so they are now nearly throughout the entire U.S. MG infection was first documented in them in 1974 in the mid-Atlantic seaboard. The infection is now throughout the eastern house finch population and in pockets in the western U.S. Although MG infection has been recognized as being in Arkansas for some years, this case is the first scientific documentation to our knowledge. Other surveys have found house finches to have pox infection or also combined pox and MG infections. The two conditions look the same clinically with the swollen tissue around the eyes and sinuses.

A contagious disease at bird feeding and watering stations may require that the station be closed, or at least that sanitation measures should be taken, or that the birds be encouraged to not concentrate in a small area. Salmonellosis is another periodic feeding station disease we have seen in Arkansas.

Written by [Dr. James O. Britt](#)



Figure 1 (Male House Finch)

Photo Courtesy of [Shaw Creek Bird Supply](#)

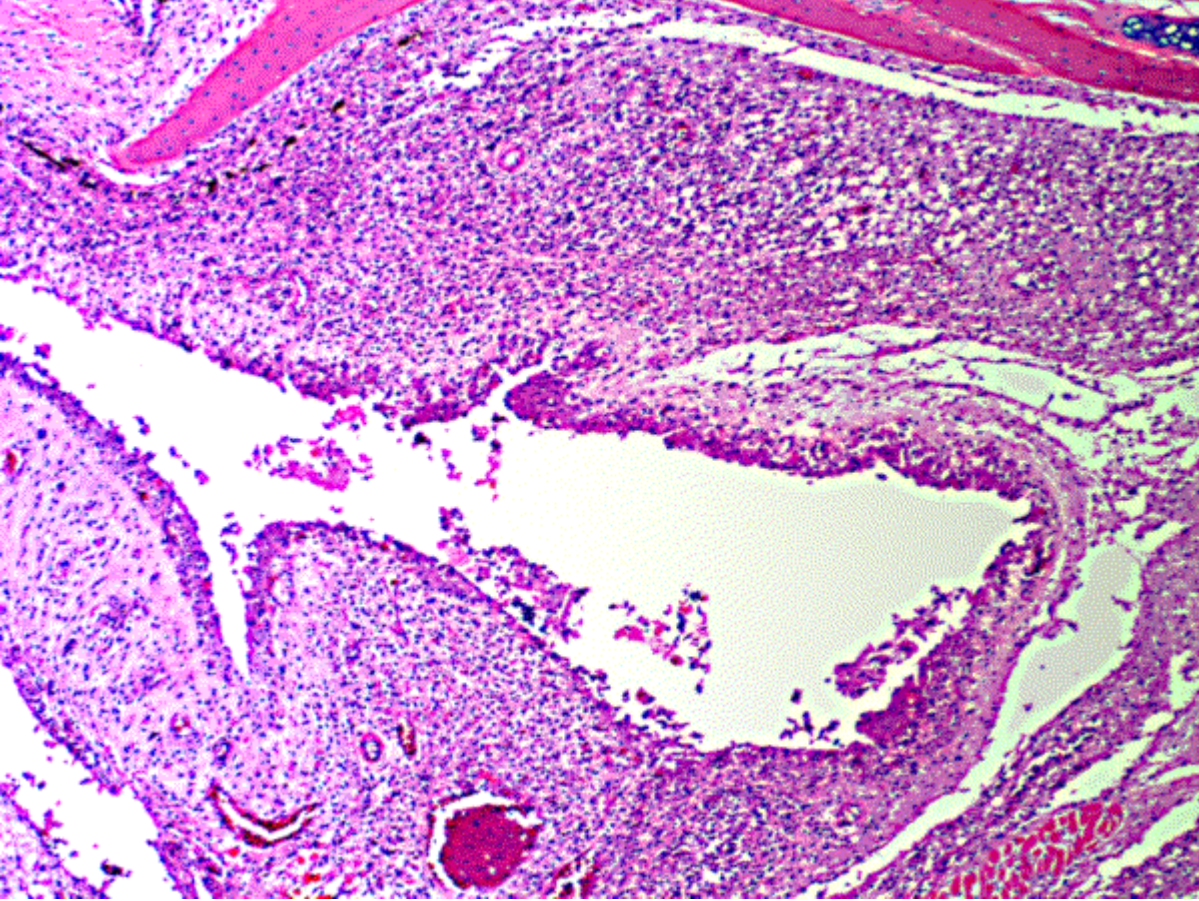


Figure 2 (Conjunctivitis)

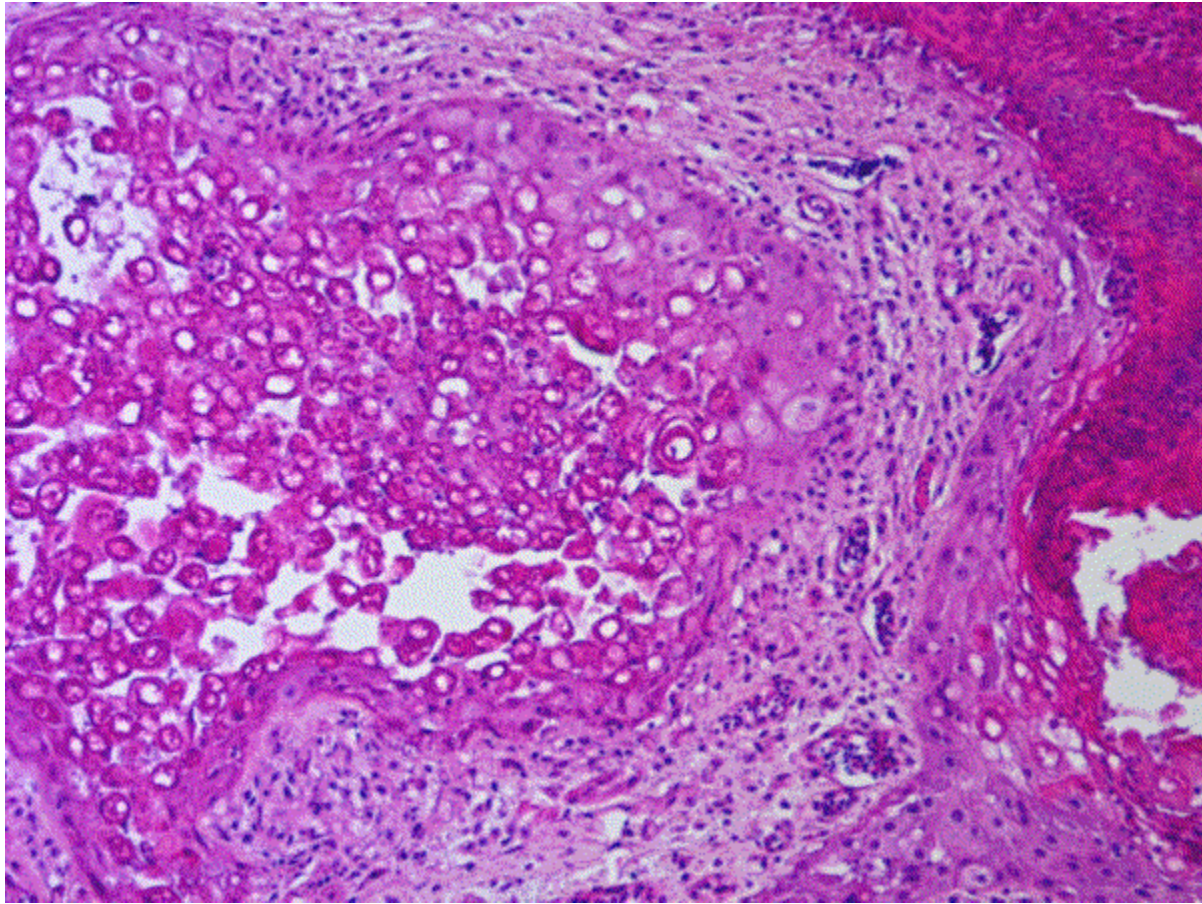


Figure 3 (Squamous cell hyperplasia with cytoplasmic pox inclusions)

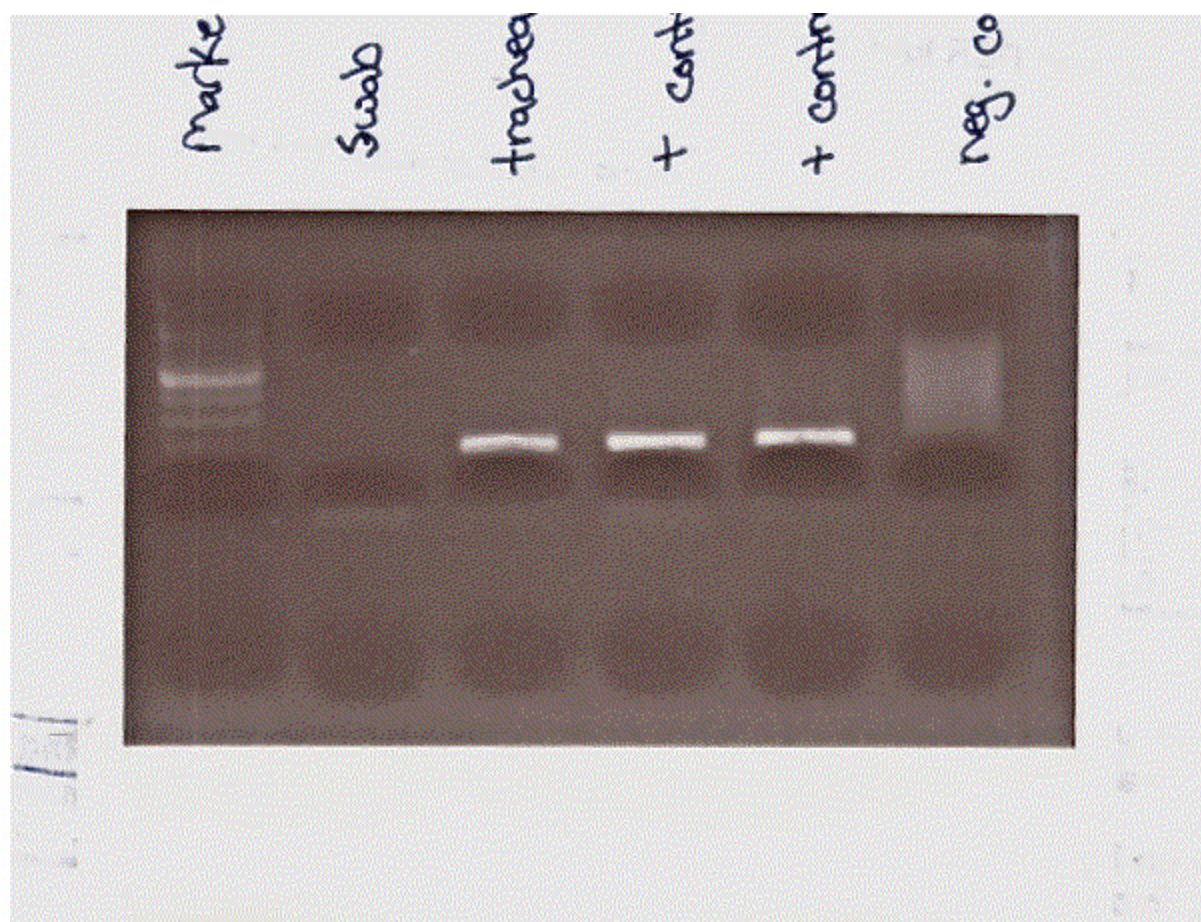


Figure 4 (Positive MG trachea, Lane 3 and 2 positive controls)